

TESTIMONY OF ESTHER KIAAINA  
ON THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS BETWEEN  
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND NATIVE HAWAIIANS

My name is Esther Kiaaina and I am the Chief of Staff and Legislative Director for Congressman Robert Underwood from Guam. Prior to my current position, I was the primary legislative aide on Native Hawaiian issues for Senator Daniel Akaka for nearly nine years, from 1990 to March 1999.

I believe that my background on a multitude of issues affecting Native Hawaiians at the federal level, including the history and final enactment of the Apology Resolution, would be helpful during the panel dialogue and roundtable discussions on reconciliation and the political relationship between Native Hawaiians and the federal government.

Given the tortuous and inconsistent record of U.S. policy toward Native Hawaiians, which include the conflicting Blount and Morgan reports that followed the 1893 overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani, the conflicting Majority and Minority reports of the 1983 Native Hawaiians Study Commission, and the flip-flops by the U.S. Department of Interior on whether or not a trust relationship exists between Native Hawaiians and the federal government, it should come as no surprise that I fully support the reconciliation process being established between the Native Hawaiian community and the federal government.

For too long, Native Hawaiians have been denied a process within the Executive Branch to address many of the outstanding land and political status issues that will forever impact Native Hawaiians and non-Native Hawaiians in the State of Hawaii. That is why the reconciliation process is so important. There are many people who believe strongly that certain models for self-determination and land dispute resolution exist under the framework of U.S. or international laws that can adequately deal with Native Hawaiians. While these models can provide guidance, I believe that the current legal norms are inadequate for dealing with Native Hawaiians and that part of the reconciliation process should be focused on promoting new resolutions or models uniquely tailored for Native Hawaiians.

The underlying goal of both federal officials and the Native Hawaiian community should be to balance the need for redressing past wrongs committed by the U.S. government against Native Hawaiians, particularly the loss of sovereignty and land, and the need to ensure that no individual, whether they be Native Hawaiian or non-Native Hawaiian, should ever be made to feel that they are not entitled to call Hawaii home. The issue of disharmony among the races in Hawaii was partially caused by the history of U.S. involvement in the Hawaiian islands. The federal government can do what is right to improve their relations with Native Hawaiians. The added benefit is that such a goal may also go a long way at helping race relations in Hawaii.

I look forward to participating in these important discussions.